



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

June 1, 2023

Regarding AB 48

Representative Spiros, Representative Schutt, and other esteemed members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, thank you for the opportunity to speak about this important and often hidden problem of sex trafficking of young people in Wisconsin.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America advocates to protect all of God's children. The severe abuse that sex-trafficked children and youth experience is beyond what most of us can imagine. Allowing for the arrest and prosecution of youth under 18 caught engaging in prostitution re-victimizes those young people by the systems that should be protecting them. This is the only circumstance in which we charge child sexual assault victims with a crime, either directly with prostitution charges or, and as is often the case, with lighter charges such as lewd and lascivious behavior. In addition, as one of three states still defaulting 17-year-old youth into adult courts, a 17-year-old would be even more severely re-traumatized. Wisconsin now must provide protective services for victims of sex trafficking. So, let's focus on offering our young people those services, and not re-victimize them by treating them as criminals in the juvenile or adult court system.

At least 30 states, both with legislatures that are predominantly Republican and ones that are predominantly Democrat have passed laws like AB 48. But we have pointed this out to you before. We have had high hopes that this bill would be written into law in the past. There are rumors about why the bill did not pass. Were there religious misunderstandings that confuse victims with criminals? Has a talk show host in Milwaukee been overly influential? Some say the bill hasn't passed because of a minority of voices in law enforcement. What about police who support this bill?

I am here again to ask that you vote this bill out of committee and encourage it to come to the floor without adding amendments that would erase the intention and benefit of the bill. We also ask for clear communication. If some of you are opposed to this bill, we respectfully ask that you please be clear about why and give the public a chance to be in further dialogue with you or those who are influencing you to vote against it.

Please search your hearts and do the right thing. Please support AB 48.

God's blessings on your work.

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